



Jane Dyson
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By email: jwd@disabilityalliancebc.org

Dear Ms. Dyson,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Disability Alliance BC's 2017 provincial election questionnaire.

Sincerely,

Today's BC Liberals

Provincial Disability Assistance

In April 2017, BC's provincial disability assistance rate was increased by \$50 to \$1,033 a month for a single person. While this increase was welcome, people with disabilities who receive the PWD benefit will continue to live in poverty. If elected would your government commit to indexing disability assistance and developing a clear timeline to increase assistance rates to \$1,200 a month?

Today's BC Liberals have made jobs and economic growth a priority to ensure that we are able to take care of the people that we love. It's because we are a leader in economic and job growth that we are able to make significant investments in things like health care, education, and programs to help people in need.

Changes our government has made to support persons with disabilities include:

- Became the first province to fully exempt child support payments for families on income or disability assistance.
- Became the first province to introduce annualized earning exemptions of \$9,600/year for persons with disabilities.
- Increased asset limits for people on disability assistance.
- Extended the Home Renovation Tax Credit to include persons with disabilities.

- Created the WorkAble internship program for new graduates with disabilities to enter the BC Public Service - 75% of first year interns still work for the Public Service.
- Established a network of business leaders to engage with employers to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Modernized the Guide Dog and Service Dog Act to strengthen the rights of those with service dogs.
- Cut red tape by simplifying the disability assistance application process.
- Provided \$10 million to BC Food Banks to expand refrigeration and storage capacity for perishable foods.

We also support persons with disabilities with the Single Parent Employment Initiative (SPEI). The SPEI was created in response to hearing of a series of practical barriers within the government's system of supports that created a disincentive to single parents on income or disability assistance who wanted to find work or improve their training for a job.

This program removes many obstacles, and has cleared the way for 4,600 parents to sign up with over 900 now working. On average, 40-50 new single parents join each week and 47 are finding a job each month. That is real progress – we know that the best thing for any family is a job.

Today's BC Liberals will also develop a Low Income Families in Transition (LIFT) pilot program that will provide temporary assistance to low-income single working parents so they can take time away from their current employment or reduce their hours without financial penalty, and assist with training, childcare and transit costs while upgrading or acquiring new skills.

In addition, Today's BC Liberals will:

- Provide an additional \$199 million to increase the assistance rates for about 100,000 people with disabilities by \$50 per month.
- Work to become the province with the most generous child benefit exemptions for the calculation of income and disability assistance.
- Increase the net income threshold for low-income individuals to \$19,749 to qualify for the BC Tax Reduction Credit.
- Encourage charitable giving with a substantial increase in the value of the tax credit for charitable donations to a maximum value of \$500 on the first \$1,100 of donations.
- Permanently implement the BC Farmers' Food Donation Tax Credit to encourage farmers and farming corporations to donate certain agricultural products they produce to registered charities such as food banks or school meal programs.

Guaranteed Annual Income for People with Disabilities

Ontario has announced it will test a basic income pilot starting in April 2017 while other provinces have committed to reviewing the concept. This model of income support has the potential to remove the stigma associated with receiving assistance and delivering supports through a more efficient and respectful process. If elected, would your government commit to working with the community to develop a pilot project to test a basic income for British Columbians with disabilities?

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BC Accessibility Legislation

British Columbians with disabilities routinely experience barriers to accessing housing, employment, transportation and other services. The Canadian government is currently creating accessibility legislation which will govern areas under federal jurisdiction. If elected, would your government commit to enacting accessibility legislation for BC with enforceable standards and regulations for areas under provincial jurisdiction?

Accessibility 2024 is B.C.'s 10-year action plan to become the most progressive province in Canada for people with disabilities. The plan was constructed after broad public consultation with thousands of British Columbians and sets out clear goals with concrete steps to reduce barriers to create more accessible, inclusive communities.

If re-elected, Today's BC Liberals will continue to work towards the goals of Accessibility 2024 with specific commitments to:

- Establish an accessibility lens on regulations and legislation, including introducing legislative changes necessary to accomplish our goals
 - Ensure all government owned or leased customer service buildings are fully accessible by 2020 (exceptions for heritage properties).
 - Work with B.C. technology companies to be early adopters to showcase and test new accessibility technologies in government buildings and services.
 - Work with the BC Hotel Association to develop regulations regarding accessible room requirements in new construction.
 - Explore developing a registry for accessible housing in B.C.
 - Work with communities to ensure all emergency preparedness plans consider persons with disabilities.
 - Work with Destination BC to profile existing and emerging tourism opportunities for persons with disabilities.

We will also create a Minister responsible for accessibility who will work to make BC the most accessible jurisdiction for disabled people in North America.

Addictions Support

Mental health and addiction services are usually provided through separate, no co-located organizations with separate treatment programs. This creates significant gaps and challenges for individuals needing to access help for both these conditions, the majority of people. If elected would your government assist mental health and addictions services to operate as a shared practice in order to provide British Columbians with mental health and addiction issues better care and supports? Would you also continue and increase funding to addictions recovery services, include InSites, on-street and residential daytox/detox, and no barrier housing?

Today's BC Liberals are committed to providing the best supports for people facing challenges associated with mental illness and problematic substance use, and we have made it a priority to build a comprehensive system of these services throughout the province. Our government spends about \$1.5 billion per year in mental health and substance use services, including programs for children and youth.

There was a time when those with mental health and substance use problems would be forced to suffer in silence because of the shame and stigma associated with these treatable disorders. While we're making progress to prevent, treat and support people on their path to recovery, there is always more to do.

This is one of the reasons we moved to secure a new, long-lasting funding agreement with the federal government that will invest new money into critical mental health supports across the country.

Today's BC Liberal's will work with the federal government to begin flowing these additional investments as quickly as possible so British Columbians have easy and effective access to these programs and treatment options. We will also fund an additional 250 mental health and problematic substance use beds by 2022.

We will build on these initiatives with the following actions dedicated to youth:

- Confirm \$165 million for youth mental health needs and substance abuse issues with the following investments:
 - \$45 million to provide resources to allow for more mental health counselling and treatment for children.
 - \$12 million to provide up to 28 highly specialized addiction treatment beds for youth.
 - \$9 million for the expansion of youth service centres at up to five sites, each expected to reach 1,200-2,500 more clients annually.
 - Up to \$5 million to support mental health services for post-secondary students.
 - \$2 million annually for the BC Centre on Substance Use, largely for clinical research in support of evidence-based addiction treatments.
 - \$10 million to reduce wait lists for substance use treatment services incremental to those provided by the Health Authorities.

- \$65 million over two years to acquire and renovate buildings to house some of our most vulnerable, including youth with mental health and substance use issues.
- Launch five integrated youth service centres in Abbotsford, Campbell River, Kelowna, North Shore, and Prince George through Foundry.
- Reopen the Crossing at Keremeos near Ashnola, a 22-bed program to provide intensive residential substance use treatment for youth young adults aged 17-24.

ICBC Accident Benefits (Part 7) Motor Vehicle Act

Disability Alliance BC has been calling for an increase to Part 7 payments for years. People who qualify for Part 7 receive a maximum \$150,000 lifetime payout for rehabilitation and medical expenses. This amount has not increase for over 20 years and is clearly inadequate. Power wheelchairs, for example, can cost thousands of dollars and usually last for about 5 years. If an individual is at fault, they cannot file a tort or “not at fault” claim for expenses not covered at ICBC. If elected, would your government commit to working with the community in order to develop a clear timeline to increase payouts available through Part 7?

Under British Columbia’s civil law system, injured parties have access to both no fault Part 7 benefits and cost of future care or wage replacement as part of a personal injury settlement or judgment. Any changes to Part 7 benefits would have to be considered in light of the impact on basic ICBC rates as set by the British Columbia Utilities Commission and the availability of private insurance and other government benefit programs, such as income assistance or workers compensation.

Home Care and Support

As British Columbians are ageing, there will be an increased need for home care and home support to ensure that individuals can stay living in the community. This will be the case for all British Columbians including people with disabilities. The provision of home care and home support is trailing demand and people are not receiving the support they need to live with independence and dignity. If elected, would your government commit to improving home care and home support services to help ensure that people with disabilities and seniors have the supports they need to live in the community?

Seniors built this province. They have been there for us, and now we need to be there for them. BC has a growing, aging, and active population and we need to invest in making sure our healthcare system takes care of seniors with the dignity and respect they deserve, no matter how complex their needs. We have increased the number of clients receiving home health services 36% between 2001 and 2016 but we know we can do more. Over the next four years, Today’s BC Liberals are committed to a \$500 million funding boost to improve care for seniors across the system.

Included in this is \$275 million over the next four years for home and community care services as part of the recent health funding agreement with the federal government. In addition, health authorities will keep increasing their budgets for home and community care – reaching approximately \$200 million above current levels by 2020-21. To further improve the quality of care, Today's BC Liberals are committed to hiring about 1,500 additional staff, including health-care assistants, nurses, occupational therapists, and physiotherapists.

We are also providing \$90 million over the next three years to help create new teams of primary care providers in communities throughout BC, starting in those with the greatest need for enhanced primary care services. This team-based primary care model will particularly benefit seniors and those with complex health needs – helping to keep them healthier, more independent, and out of hospital. We're able to make this investment because of the strong economy British Columbians have built, and a solid plan that invests in the services people count on.

We are committed to increasing funding for an additional 500 nurses per year across the province by 2022. We will train and place an additional 100 nurse practitioners across British Columbia and create more spaces for in-demand professions, such as physiotherapists and speech therapists. And we will identify retention programs to ensure these health care providers remain in rural and northern communities.

To ensure seniors can live healthy, active lives within their communities, Today's BC Liberals will:

- Invest \$1 million in grants to communities across British Columbia to build activity areas that are appropriate for seniors suffering from dementia.
- Provide an additional \$2 million to the Union of BC Municipalities to fund our age-friendly communities program and expand access for seniors across our province.
- Introduce an Active Seniors Credit to support and promote seniors leading active healthy lifestyles.

We have also provided \$31 million in funding to enhance the Better at Home program in more than 100 communities, helping seniors stay in their homes longer. In addition, Today's BC Liberals will double the Home Renovation Tax Credit to \$20,000 for improvements to accommodate family members with disabilities. We will introduce a Respite Tax Credit of up to \$2,500 for people caring for seniors or family members with disabilities. And we commit to dedicating all funds provided by the federal government in the recent BC-Canada health agreement to incremental home care and mental health supports.

Rehab for people who are blind or have low vision

Currently there is no funding provided specifically for rehabilitation for people who are blind or have low vision. Rehab includes all the skills individuals with this disability require to live independently, become employed or self-employed, and live a productive life. Such skills include, but are not limited to using Braille, traveling with a white can, adaptive computer technology, cooking and life skills. If elected, would your government allocate/provide funding for blindness rehabilitation to individuals so they can access the rehab services they need?

Today's BC Liberals would be pleased to meet with the Disability Alliance of BC to discuss this issue in more detail.

Woodlands School Survivors

DABC has been helping the survivors of Woodlands School for more than 10 years to help them obtain recognition and compensation for the physical, sexual and emotional abuse they suffered while at Woodlands. In July 2010, the BC Supreme Court approved a settlement agreement to which former residents can apply for compensation. Tragically only individuals at Woodlands after August 1st 1974 can apply which means the oldest and some of the most fragile survivors continue to be ignored. If elected, would your government ensure that all survivors, regardless of when they were at Woodlands, can apply for compensation?

Today's BC Liberals acknowledge the former residents of Woodlands who have spoken out about their experiences and the impact it has had on their lives. We believe that our government has approached this issue in a fair manner, based on a previous court ruling on a different matter. Our approach has been confirmed as proper by the BC Court of Appeal. If we ignored the principle of law to compensate one group, like the residents before 1974, it would significantly affect others. Going forward, we want to resolve all lawful claims that fall within the settlement agreement as quickly as possible.